Cleveland Museum of Art Unveils Indigenous American Initiative

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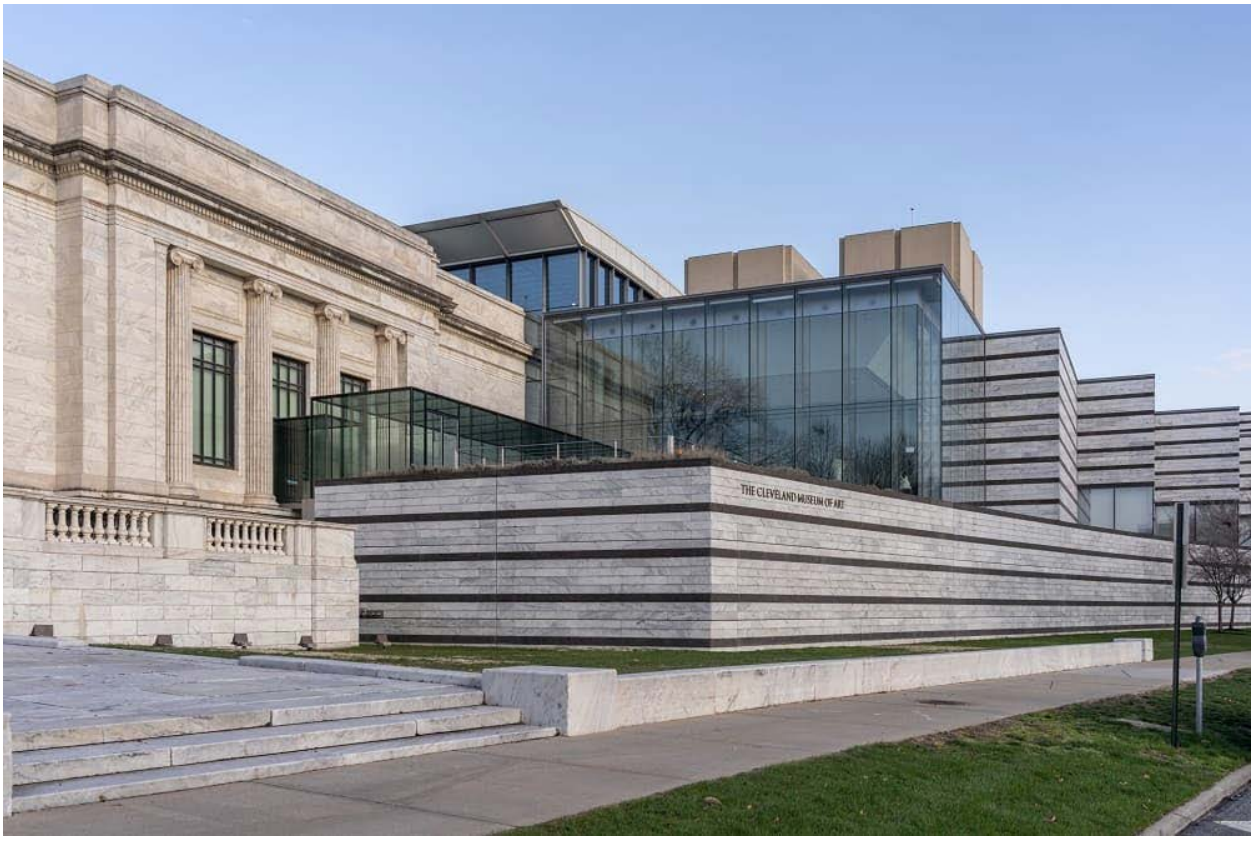

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Dialogue with local Native Americans results in an “Indigenous Peoples and Land Acknowledgment,” art acquisition, programming, and updated gallery interpretation

CLEVELAND (January 31, 2023) — Working in concert with an advisory committee of area Native Americans, the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) has adopted an “Indigenous Peoples and Land Acknowledgement” to recognize the Native Americans who were dispossessed from this region in the past and to inaugurate a new era of collaboration with Indigenous peoples living in Northeast Ohio today. This initiative includes a series of efforts to enhance representation of Indigenous Americans in the museum’s permanent collection, exhibitions, and public programs.

The CMA is publicly launching the initiative with an announcement of the acquisition of an important set of prints by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish/Métis/Shoshone); updated

interpretation in the Sarah P. and William R. Robertson Gallery for Native North American Art; and an upcoming lecture by Seneca artist G. Peter Jemison. The acknowledgement itself has recently been posted as a plaque in the museum's Horace Kelley Art Foundation North Lobby and a longer statement explaining its purpose and background is on its website.

"Our strategic plan prioritizes the thoughtful, factual representation of diverse cultures and their histories. An important aspect of this is the people who once lived on and cared for the land we occupy now," said William Griswold, director and president of the CMA. "It was imperative that this be done in consultation with the local Indigenous community."

The CMA convened the Indigenous advisory committee in late 2021 to discuss whether an acknowledgment should be made, to seek guidance on the ways Native Americans and their arts are presented in the galleries, and to explore ways to develop a long-term relationship with the region's Indigenous community. Committee members represent a range of ancestries and tribal affiliations; some have deep roots in Northeast Ohio while others arrived more recently.

The committee made a series of recommendations on topics including Indigenous staffing, internships, programming, and outreach. The museum has adopted the recommendations, incorporating those relevant into its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan, the most comprehensive such plan published by a major art museum in the United States.

"The CMA's commitment to a diverse civic engagement with the inclusion of Indigenous art and local Native community perspectives sets a high standard for the major cultural institutions of Cleveland," says Joseph Connolly (Haudenosaunee, Six Nations of the Grand River), a member of the advisory committee and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, Lake Erie Professional Chapter. "This was a true partnership and I am excited about the expansion of the representation of Indigenous culture and art the CMA will showcase in the future."

Recent Acquisition

Recognizing that Indigenous artists are underrepresented in its collection, the CMA is pleased to announce the acquisition of *Survival*, a series of four lithographs by artist and activist Jaune Quick-To-See Smith. An enrolled Salish member of Montana's Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation, she is one of the best known and most prolific Indigenous women printmakers working today.

Smith began her multimedia practice during the 1970s, focusing primarily on tribal politics, human rights, and environmental issues. Her distinctive, collaged style combines

Indigenous stories and symbols with references to canonical art history, suggesting a place for her own experience and culture within contemporary art.

The *Survival* prints are among Smith's most important works created over the past five decades. Each is titled for one of the "pillars of survival"—humor, wisdom/knowledge, tribe/community, and nature/medicine—that the artist sees as crucial to Indigenous Americans' survival through centuries of trauma caused by land loss, forced relocation, and genocide. The four lithographs are on display in Toby's Gallery for Contemporary Art (229A) and will be followed by the acquisition and display of works by other Indigenous artists.

Updated Gallery Interpretation

The museum's staff has created new interpretive texts for the Sarah P. and William R. Robertson Gallery for Native North American Art following the advice of Indigenous advisors, who made several key suggestions about how to update the presentation. One was to address historical realities more candidly, in part by discussing how settler colonialism has affected artistic production in each of the geographic regions represented in the gallery.

Another was to include, where possible, quotes from contemporary Indigenous artists, scholars, and other leaders in order to represent Native points of view and to establish that Indigenous Americans have not disappeared—a persistent popular misconception. Rather, in the words of the advisory committee, Indigenous peoples continue to live as our neighbors, co-workers, and classmates, with unique identities, cultures, and histories.

New gallery texts also explain why certain objects remain off view and in storage due to cultural sensitivities, decisions that respond to specific Native advice and national trends.

Upcoming Programming

The CMA is pleased to invite audiences to save the date for a lecture by G. Peter Jemison (Seneca, Heron Clan), the esteemed artist, author, curator, educator, and filmmaker. Free and open to the public, the lecture, entitled "ART is the Agent of Change," will take place on Saturday, March 4, 2023, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. in Gartner Auditorium to commemorate the land acknowledgment initiative.

Jemison is the recipient of the 2023 Johnson Fellowship for Artists Transforming Communities from Americans for the Arts. His art embodies *orenda*, the traditional Haudenosaunee (hoe-deh-no-show-knee) belief that every living thing and every part of creation contains a spiritual force. (The Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy comprises six nations; among them are the Seneca and Cayuga, who are recognized in the

museum's acknowledgment.) Jemison's widely collected and exhibited works explore a variety of topics, from political and social commentary to reflections on relationships with the natural world. An authority on Haudenosaunee history, he is also a self-described "culture worker." One of his interests is building bridges to broad audiences by improving understanding of Seneca traditions and history.

Visitors are encouraged to read the land acknowledgment, visit the Sarah P. and William R. Robertson Gallery for Native North American art (231), see Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's *Survival* in Toby's Gallery for Contemporary Art (229A), and attend G. Peter Jemison's lecture to learn more.

"This initiative would not have been possible without the guidance of our Native American advisors," said Griswold. "Over the course of the last year, they have helped us explore ways we can meaningfully respond to their needs and interests; as a standing advisory group they will ensure that Native voices continue to be heard and reflected at the museum."